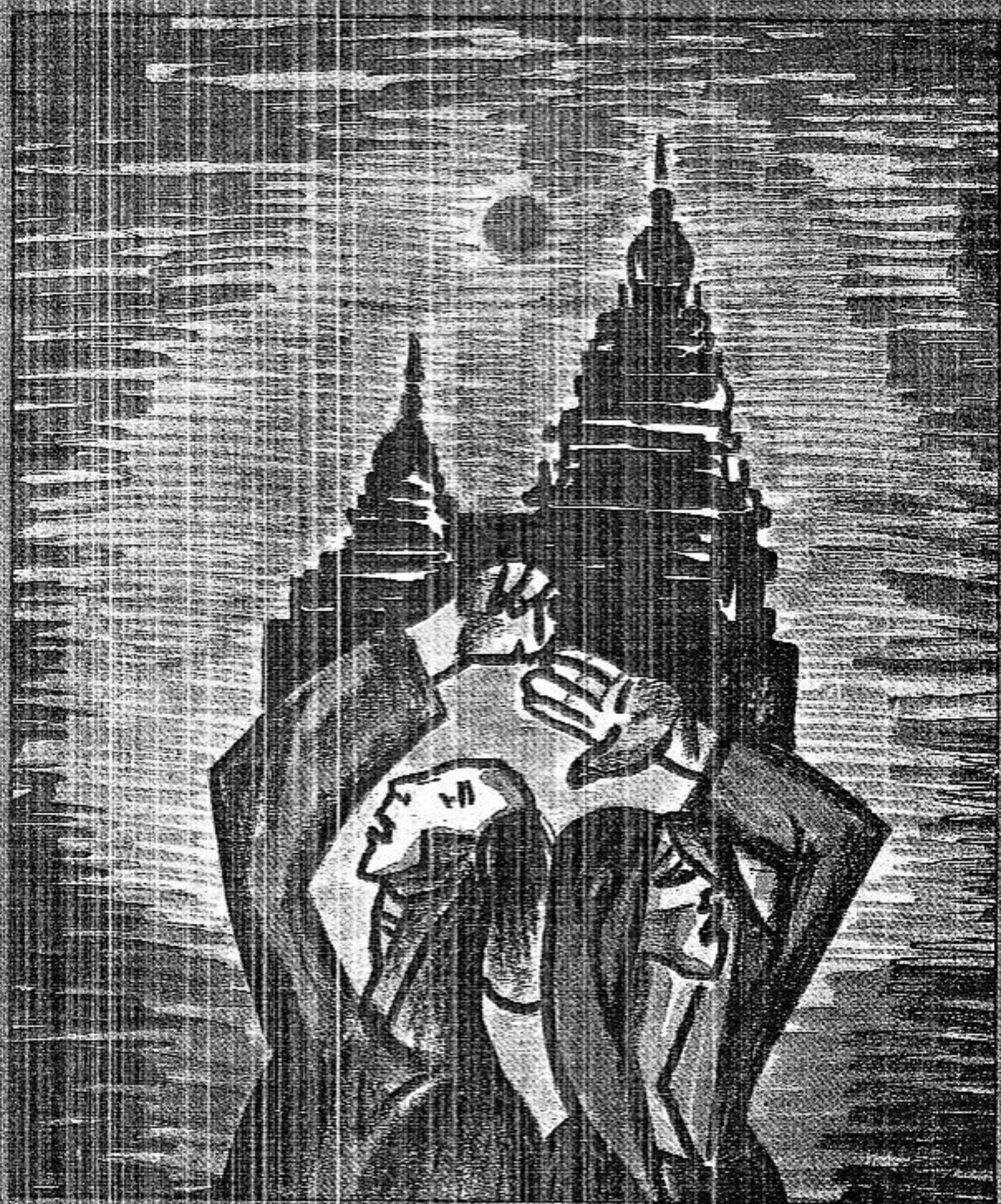


A  
Temple in Ayodhya  
and other poems



Amit Jayaram



While many think the nation slipped back several decades on December 6th, 1992, others find the event a cause for celebration.

However, one predominant view is that it has created a deep schism in our nation, which threatens our integrity and questions our Indianness.

**A Temple in Ayodhya and other poems** is a collection that holds a mirror to the event, to help us all focus on it and define, or redefine, our responses to the incident—and all it implies.

The book has three sections. The first, **A Temple in Ayodhya**, reflects on men, monuments and mysticism. The second, **Man**, turns the inward eye on the strange, elusive amalgam known as man. The third, **Who killed Safdar Hashmi?**, looks at life in the web of inter-relations people call society.

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*Vigil*

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*Not This Not That*

Ashok Mahajan

*Uniformly Crazy*

Sanjiv Bhatla

*Haiku, My Friend*

# *A Temple in Ayodhya*

Amit Jayaram

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To the big blue yonder,  
whence it all came.

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To Tarun and Raabiya, my two little says of sunshine; and to Keerti, without whom this book, and much else, would have been impossible.

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OM PURNAMIDAH PURNAMIDAM  
PURNATH PURNAMUDACHYATHE  
PURNASYA PURNAMEDAYA  
PURNAMEVAVASHISHYATHE

Om  
That is the whole,  
This is the whole,  
From wholeness emerges wholeness,  
Wholeness comes from wholeness,  
Wholeness still remains.

*A Temple in Ayodhya*

Reflections on men, monuments  
and mysticism

*Temple*

A place of worship

*Ayodhya*

Town in Uttar Pradesh; birthplace of Lord  
Rama



## *Let's Build a Temple*

Let's build a temple to Lord Rama  
Let's build the temple in our hearts  
A goodly temple, soft and gentle  
In peace, without these fits and starts

Let's build it, in our Hindu vein  
Without a trace of hate or blame  
Let's build it with red bricks of love  
And light in it compassion's flame

Let's consecrate this temple to  
The all encompassing one above  
Who made us all, and gave us all  
Limitless, effulgent love

Let's make this temple blazon forth  
Throughout the day, throughout the night  
That God's great will must never be  
Defiled by muscles or by might

Let's let all people come into  
This temple which reveals the sky  
God is no man's property  
No man knows the reason why

If our faith is really great  
Let's ope' its doors to all the world  
Let universal breezes raise  
A universal flag unfurled

Let this temple tell the world  
We are not petty, not infirm  
We are not threatened or afraid  
No force on earth can make us squirm

We do not need to etch our faith  
With iron on the stones of time  
It's all around, within, without  
It needs no mortar, bricks or lime

We do not need to stress, define  
Our faith against another's creed  
One of the world's most ancient faiths  
Has no need to resort to greed

Let's build a temple to Lord Rama  
Let's build the temple in our hearts  
A goodly temple, soft and gentle  
Where anger dies, hatred departs

## *The Day*

It was the day  
that made all the difference  
After the day  
it was always night  
No matter  
how many times the sun rose  
or set  
it was always night.

The nightmare comes and goes  
but night stays on  
And that large, enveloping darkness  
soon absorbs  
even those little rays of light  
that were left behind

This is my darkness  
This is your darkness  
This is everybody's darkness  
Yes — even the darkness of those  
who made it happen  
so that their lives  
would have more light

How can deep darkness  
bring more light?  
How can the howling cry  
of anguish give birth to joy?

It was the day  
that made all the difference

Before the day  
it was sometimes bright  
sometimes night

The cloak  
of inky black darkness  
had not yet  
swirled around our world

Before the day  
we were not strangers in our homes  
And needed  
no towering forms in black  
to tell us who we were  
what we wanted  
why we lived

What is this love so fragile  
that any stranger can dash it dead?

Why are we tinderboxes  
for every lawless hand  
to ignite?



## *The Very Stone Can Feel*

My baby dead  
what did it do?

What stone walls are these  
That snatch away  
the breath from my infant's lips?

We're blind and deaf  
We cannot hear  
Our greed for power  
Has blocked our ears  
Even as we break the stone  
The stone it shivers  
Sheds a tear

It cries for my poor baby's life  
It cries for all the men who groan  
It cries for women turned to stone  
By our jagged million-headed knife

What are these tears? They hurt us not  
What are these howls? We sleep in peace  
While they cower, whine and freeze  
Submerged by our sinister plot

We are the authors of this dying  
Yes, all of us who shout and scream  
Fracture, pummel fragile dreams  
Turn laughter to sad moans and sighing

The very stone can feel, can think  
But men are rotten, women stink  
How can we eat and laugh and drink  
While widows howl and bodies shrink?

## *Mask-like Faces*

Let's hide behind each other  
Let's lie flat on the ground  
And pretend we aren't there. . .

They won't notice  
They'll go away  
And we can start living again

Let's close our eyes to their screams  
Turn mask-like faces to stone  
Present our back to trouble  
What can we do alone?

Let's hide behind each other  
Let's lie flat on the ground  
And pretend we aren't there. . .

## *Dear God*

Dear God, we will not ever rest  
Till we repay, give you your due  
E'en if we must finally test  
Ourselves by blindly killing you

Dear God, your house is sacred, great  
Our swords are out to make it true  
We'll thrash the heathen scoundrels now  
Teach them a precious thing or two

Dear God, we're always at your service  
We'll build a building of your dreams  
Cement it with the blood of children  
Tears of women, father's screams

Dear God, we hope you like our service  
We want you to accept it please  
Why do you think we burnt those houses  
Made infants bake and children freeze?

Dear God, you are most special to us  
There's only one, just one of you  
The others are just worthless heathens  
Who cares? Let's whip and flog a few



Dear God, we are not cringing cowards  
Who whimper, whine and wag our tail  
Anyone who slights your form  
We'll kill — e'en if he's weak and frail

Dear God, we are misunderstood  
All we want is peace and love  
But no one wants to let it be  
These other guys, they push and shove

Dear God, how can they understand  
Their God is false, while you are true  
We are but serfs at your command  
Taming them to pray to you

Dear God, this world is harsh and wicked  
People say we fight for gain  
Place no flowers at your great altar  
But death and sickness, screams and pain

Dear God, we'll build a temple massive  
Bigger than the biggest hill  
To sing your praise, make all your subjects  
Ever bending to your will

Dear God who made us, gave us form  
You we solemnly do praise  
Whether in the sun that rises  
Or whether in the whip that flays

Dear God, remember you're the reason  
You're the rhyme, the goal, the light  
And all who come in your great way  
Must very firmly be set right

Dear God, give people wisdom, insight  
Tell them that we mean no harm  
Fill their hearts with fear for you  
And we will all withdraw, be calm

Dear God, it's hard, but we abandon  
All daily chores, set out to save  
The faithless heathens from their folly  
Send the blackguards to their graves

Dear God, we're sad to have to say this  
If even you stood in the way  
We'd have to kill you, don't you see  
So that you are redeemed and saved

## *Enlightenment*

So how now, there, my little lamb  
My darling ewe, my snowy ram  
You have no faith, no creed, no race  
You just gambol, run and chase  
Dear lamb, your simple mind would split  
Your ears would stand, you'd throw a fit  
If you were told that these great men  
Who wield a stick and use a pen  
Divide themselves and make a fuss  
It's them for them and us for us  
Imagine lambs who went to church  
Temples, mosques, to pray and search  
For God, who is below, above  
Within, without, in truth, in love  
And then kill, loot and plunder, raid  
The other lambs that God has made  
There, there, I understand your baa  
There, you're free — gambol afar  
Some day, perhaps our men — all shams  
Become enlightened, like all lambs

## *A Small Plot of Land*

Poor Lord Rama  
The Monarch of the Universe once  
Today, it all depends  
On one small plot of land  
In an unfortunate town  
Called Ayodhya



## Grown-ups

I don't know much, I'm little, small  
But I can't understand  
So many things the grown-ups do  
Across our great big land

I'm so confused, my teachers say  
That honesty will rise  
Yet, all I hear and feel and see  
It tells me: No! Just lies!

Our holy books, they tell us to  
Love all the world as one  
But my elders and my betters  
Raise a sword, a gun

My parents tell me to respect  
All faiths, as they do mine  
But every day, more grown-ups die  
For some religious shrine

What lesson will we children learn  
With grown-ups acting thus?  
Can I be impudent, and say  
That they should learn from us?

Because no longer do we watch  
And see the fight from far  
Kids like me are being killed  
In grown-ups' holy wars

I don't know much, I'm little, small  
But I can't understand  
So many things the grown-ups do  
Across our great big land

## *Death Comes to Dance*

Break my bones  
Kill my wife  
Slaughter my child  
Burn my house. . .

But what will you do  
At night  
When death comes  
To dance with you?

## *Across the Sands*

If I were dead, and you were here  
With lifeless pen in lifeless hand  
Which words would come to you, my dear  
When time, and I, have crossed the sands?

Between my tears, I sometimes smile  
To think the hand that struck you dead  
Considered, for that little while  
Satisfied, revenged, well fed

But foolish being, you lost it all  
By killing my true, my only love  
Because in fear and guilt you'll crawl  
While he just watches from above

I sit and watch and wonder at  
The smoke that leaves the chimney tops  
It's all dull, boring, drab and flat  
An endless army of full stops

But you're in me, I see you now  
Reclining in that cane armchair  
With twinkling eyes that tell me how  
And when and what and who and where

Some summers past, the pain will slow  
And you will come alive in me  
For though blind hatred howl below  
Love will triumph, we'll be free

If I were dead and you were here  
With lifeless pen in lifeless hand  
Which words would come to you, my dear  
When time, and I, have crossed the sands?

## *Cloaked in Silence*

Yes, the renaissance has begun  
Centuries of sloth have been shaken off  
And the Hindu steps forward  
From the shadows

The upstart peddlers of Hinduism  
Who speak in frenzied voice  
Have woken us from our slumber

This is not Hinduism  
It is a creature of circumstance  
Claiming to be Hindu

Because every Hindu who is a Hindu  
Is cloaked in silence

Yes, we are Hindus  
Born into a race, a creed  
That must  
At the very peril of its existence  
Oppose this masquerading fanaticism  
That wears the cloak  
Of the Hindu faith



## *Only Death*

You say you cannot speak up  
You say that they will tear  
Your life into a thousand pieces  
You'll lose the ones who care

You say that life is precious  
To you and them and me  
But where's the life? Can't find it  
It's only death I see

## *Imagined Images*

The frenzied man  
Sees his form in the mirror  
Imagines another  
And smashes the mirror

He destroys a form he created

The frenzied man  
Sees a form before him  
Imagines another  
And smashes the image

He destroys a form God created

Who's this man  
if not you and me?

## *Yourself*

Rip out the trees  
Tear up the earth  
Lay bare the skeleton  
Of what created you  
Nourished you  
And nourishes you still

The Beyond does not stop you  
The Beyond cannot stop you  
From heaping this mountain of filth  
Upon yourself

Until you see it is filth. . .

## *This and That*

We'll sit and have a cup of tea  
And chat awhile of this and that  
We'll sit and have a cup of tea  
While, all around, the world falls flat

We'll sip and talk of bad days come  
And politics that's full of scum  
But when it's time to raise our hand  
To assert, be counted, take a stand. . . .

We'll sit and have a cup of tea  
And chat awhile of this and that  
We'll sit and have a cup of tea  
While, all around, the world falls flat

## *Flesh of My Flesh*

Dad, who am I?  
From where did I come?  
Why am I here?  
And where will I go?

You are my daughter  
Born to me  
Flesh of my flesh  
Blood of my blood

I will make you like me  
I will make you me  
I will live through you  
So thoroughly  
That you will cease to exist

Is our temple  
the testament of our faith  
to be built  
on blood and tears and bones?

Is our house of prayer  
to be surrounded  
by the language of the sword?

Is our sanctum sanctorum  
our final abode of peace  
to be created on the ruins  
of another?

Are we lions  
who hold our heads aloft?  
Or jackals  
who loot and plunder?

Is this the final image  
of a fragile faith  
that has arisen over millenia?

Have we no covenant?  
Are we going to let it all  
go down the drain?

And whistle on our way to work?



## *The Earth, the Sky*

We measured heartbeats, you and I  
Our feet stepped out in time  
When you were earth, I was the sky  
Our thoughts they always rhymed

No ties of blood, no marriage bond  
Could come close to our love  
It was as if a magic wand  
Had joined us from above

Now, friendship is a funny thing  
It's hard to talk, explain  
A feeling that's a flowering  
Unlinked to praise or gain

But who could know that better than  
Poor you, my cold dead friend?  
You had no faith, no creed, no clan  
You saw all beings as men

It's hard to see how people who  
Say I am theirs, they mine  
Can aim their sticks and knives at you  
And taint me with their crime

Why are they rubber stamped?  
Why make a stigma of one's birth?  
It all should be revamped

My friend, I'll say it, say it loud  
You did not die in vain  
Till my last breath, I'll stand up, proud  
'Gainst hurt and hate and pain

Friendship, love does not depend  
On where a person kneels. . .  
But when he does not hurt, offend  
But sees and cares and feels

The body seems such solid stuff  
Compassion nought but dew  
But look deep in, and soon enough  
It will arise in you

*I . . . I . . . I*

When will my small eyes open?  
When will I be blessed to see?  
It's not you I hurt and slaughter  
It's me, it's me, it's me

When will my ears hear something  
A scream, a shout, a cry?  
It's not you I hurt and slaughter  
It's I, it's I, it's I

## *The Crowbar and the Pickaxe*

Unless you and I  
And others of our faith  
Speak up, stand up and blazon forth —  
That this is not Hinduism,  
This will be Hinduism  
To the world

Do the Gita and the Upanishads  
And the Vedas tell us  
To seek God in stone?

To lay waste, to violently assert  
A piece of land, a temple?

Do the crowbar and the pickaxe  
sum up the quintessence of Hinduism?

Must we all stand by  
And watch this parody?

Will no one speak up?  
Have we lost our tongues?

## *The Loser*

For every fight  
For every momentous battle  
Of principles  
Fought with stick and gun  
There's only one loser —  
The common man

When will we tire of living in  
A world so sad, so upside down?  
Where yes means no and no means yes  
And every smile just cloaks a frown

When will we learn that temples are  
Much more than sticks and mud and stone?  
Just symbols of God's ageless truth:  
We are together, not alone

Not us or them, but them and us  
Not I, me, mine, but we and ours  
And then the thousand stratagems  
Just vanish in the twinkling stars

When will we tire of living in  
A world so sad, so upside down?  
Where yes means no and no means yes  
And every smile just cloaks a frown



## *The Song of Time*

A wrinkle is a wondrous thing  
Because it has been earned  
An aged life can dance and sing  
The song of time it learned

A failing eye can see so clear  
Distinguish every form  
While younger, sharper eyes pass on  
Caught up in their own storm

A shaking hand can grasp the point  
Can say: No, that's a lie!  
While oak-like arms wield arms to kill  
Although they know not why

A feeble ear can hear the sound  
Of misery and pain  
While sharp, young ears are blocked to tears  
Yet hear the sound of gain

An aged nose can smell a rat  
And see that it's a ruse  
While little pups go sniff, sniff, sniff  
And scramble and abuse

A feeble brain takes two and two  
And adds it up to four  
While brilliant minds are lost in greed  
And do not know the score

I've lived eight decades, if a day  
I've seen it all go by  
All the misery and pain  
There's just one reason why

We always want it all our way  
The other's just a thing  
Who does the dirty work while we  
Do all the gathering

So break the house they made for God  
And they'll break yours as well  
Where is God in this charade?  
It's nothing but plain hell

I am so old, my days are few  
My breath is running out  
But all we do, we do to us  
About that there's no doubt

When a child says  
I don't like him  
The child says it

When a child says  
I don't like her  
The child says it

When a child says  
I don't like them  
We say it through the child

And there can be  
Nothing uglier. . .

## *You Are My World*

Come sit by me, my little one  
Dry your tears and hear  
A wondrous tale to you I'll tell  
Come closer now, my dear

Once upon a wonderful time  
This world was quite a place  
People looked at people, not  
Religion, colour, race

In those fine times, your Daddy would  
Be sitting here with us  
My dearest friend would be here soon  
To sit with you, and fuss

Their bodies would be bright and gay  
Not buried 'neath the ground  
Because, you see, their faith would be  
Unnoticed, safe and sound

The funny thing, my little one  
Is that, though it's the cause  
We must once more to God return  
Bind ourselves by his laws

No matter how men may deceive  
And twist his words and lie  
He is the source of all there is  
Between the earth and sky

That wonderful time that used to be  
Has not forever gone  
I'll speak to you, and fill your heart  
In it love will be born

More mothers, more, and many more  
Will teach their children why  
Hatred bears no fruit, they'll see  
Their love will fill the sky

In that mystic, magic world  
Where love is such a force  
Those who fight and kill and hurt  
Will have no other course

But to see their ways are wrong:  
That violence kills the soul  
The tide of love will wash them clean  
And make them pure and whole

And those faceless people who  
Did kill your father dead  
Will see their fault, will be redeemed  
In shame will hang their heads

My darling one, your eyes are closed  
Your breath is smooth and soft  
But your heart is listening  
Your spirit stands aloft

Though these weary, aged eyes  
Mayn't live to see the day  
Your tender generation will  
Let all its children play

So sleep, sleep well, my little one  
In my tired arms, soft, curled  
I pin my faith on your soft heart  
Because you are my world



## *Man*

The inward eye turned on the  
strange, elusive amalgam called man

## *Life Fled Past*

Your smile limped  
So you stood it up  
With crutches

Embraced the crucifix  
And hungered for the nails to make their mark  
On the ragged framework of skull and crossbones  
As life fled past, unknowing of your smile

What words?  
The thoughts negate themselves  
Barbaric inanities  
Aimless criss-crossings  
On the virgin white

Where are the athletes?  
The businessmen?  
The bankers?

Have they eaten well?  
Slept well?  
Dreamt well?

Throw away these empty acorns  
Son of man  
And face yourself

The sights and sounds  
Of the sensuous play  
Of a million  
Kaleidoscoping levels of reality  
Will make security  
An empty acorn

Tossed by the wind  
Singed by fire  
Flowing with the tide. . .

Who says  
The world isn't new?  
It is the beggar  
Who sees his bowl  
Reflected in the world

## *Still the Sea*

Sorrow, desperation and rage  
Tried to set stars from their course  
Willed the sun to rise due west  
Bid the sea hold its waves. . .

Until the pain is bearable

## *Changing Mirrors*

A world brought up on lies  
A world unable  
To stand  
Its tortured reflection  
In the glass

And changing mirrors  
Every day

## *Santa Once Believed in Stockings*

Maybe  
Santa Claus once believed  
In stockings

Maybe Che believed  
That guerilla warfare  
Is the answer

But today, it's all the same. . .

A civilisation  
That has been nursed  
On mothballs and corsets  
Suddenly  
Growing up to realise  
That mothballs smell awful  
And corsets are a pain



To say anything about you  
Would cloak more than uncover  
You must see my silence  
For what it is — silence  
What makes one silent  
Is the presence of beauty

*Why?*

Why  
The sky?  
Why  
Try?  
Why  
Sigh?  
Why  
Lie?  
Why  
Die?

## *Little Boys*

"Thinking of the reason  
That mind cannot perceive  
Isn't that," quoth the Fool  
"Like sand within a sieve?"

We live in a phantom world  
And play with its toys  
In attitude eager  
At it with a noise  
But we're little boys

## *Man Said That*

The bard saw bars in his prison  
So he sang of freedom  
The poet saw his impotence  
So he spoke loud and long of fruition, fulfilment  
But the pavement saw its sterility  
And remained sterile

The world's a prison  
Man said that

## Wrinkles

Your hair grows white and wrinkles line your face  
Cold age sucks in your beauty from without  
Tears and rage and sweat transform to grace  
And life's long battle isn't worth the bout  
If you suspect your inner beauty's charred  
Because no man or woman felt its form  
Because the sand was lost in its own storm  
And beauty was deferred, declaimed, debarred  
Turn once to one who saw the form you hid  
The shades that threw bright light on all the frowns  
That lingered in your smiles, took off the lid  
From all the masks, including bright gold crowns  
Which all at once took flight to realms unknown  
While moths sang songs, and flesh conversed with  
bone

The world makes magic in your soft brown eyes  
The seas advance, recede in your bright smile  
Your laughter waves goodbye to sighs and whys  
Allows not mind this nature to confile  
A moment of your madness says "amen"  
To situations which the wise condemn  
Freezing all in tones of us and them  
And the lightening silence comes again  
When two strings throb to one another's time  
And harmony arises of its own accord

Evening smooths, redcems the daytime's crime  
And frail flesh and blood is with the Lord  
What mystery makes this world go round in time  
What purity resides in primal slime?

Who knows what webs tomorrow has in store?  
Who knows what tricks fate holds in its cold hand  
Who knows what magic hides in this life's core?  
Who knows when one should sit, or make a stand  
The moment, Love, is ours, it's in our grasp  
Let us not let it slip past us in vain  
Embrace the loss, not barter with the gain  
One sweat-stained finger another firmly clasps  
This fragile song, this matchbook ode endures  
No holding back and no one stops, debars  
No disease will hurt, no easy cures  
Will mock or maim the bright and shining stars  
A moment in your company means flight  
It means that nothing's wrong, and all is right



## *Lowland*

Quite long ago, a land not far away  
Had a very weird and wondrous law  
Before a man or woman was condemned  
The people grouped against them were constrained  
To prove that they had harmed or hurt, curtailed  
Man's freedom, or exploited helpless folk  
And bar this council's speech which could indict  
The culprit was full free to walk away  
And mark, that he and she would only be  
Condemned if they consented to the charge  
The onus of the deed lay on the mob  
And sentence was not passed until the man  
The woman, hung a harried head, agreed  
That they'd transgressed, o'erstepped and trampled on  
Another's space, had robbed their ease and grace  
And felt that if the same transpired with them  
They'd also feel upset and ill at ease  
And would desire the man to see and grasp  
The fact that deeds like these threw out a web  
Which entangled all within its fragile threads



## *The Final Truth?*

Maybe the stench of queues  
And the evening sound  
Of a city in flames

Maybe the mildewed patchwork  
Of hellos and byes  
And the ragged in-betweens

Maybe the flame of lust  
The dust of love  
That lights a bonfire  
In the Godman's eyes

Maybe the strings, the horns  
The wind, the birds, the wires  
The sounds of every day

Maybe the thrust, the push  
The pull, the strain, the grab  
The gain, the loss, the innocence

Maybe the books, the looks  
The smiles that hide a horror  
Too harsh to give a name

Maybe the deal, the barter game  
To play with self, with life  
And death and God scattered in between

Maybe the pounding veins, the frenzied game  
The moth enflamed in voluptuous fire  
Encompassing all beginnings, all ends

Maybe the thought that I and mine  
Must solitary climb to the pinnacle  
While the infant's tears mock the magic of life  
Is the final truth

*Who Killed Safdar Hashmi?*

Life in the web of inter-relations  
people call society

## *Who Killed Safdar Hashmi?*

Who killed Safdar Hashmi?

Was it the gentlemen  
Just doing their job  
To make ends meet?

Or was it someone else,  
Someone like you and me,  
The guy who lives next door?

It was respectability  
that killed poor Safdar Hashmi  
A respectability  
that now mourns his death

Who killed Safdar Hashmi?

Was it those of us who worry,  
Lest our neighbour look down on us?

Or those who lead their lives  
Within the rigid rails of  
"What will others think?"

Or those who have their bone,  
Want to be left alone  
To chew it and chew it and chew it  
In peace?

Or those who look upon all life  
And love and care  
As an investment,  
For something in return?

Or those so fully wrapped in me and mine  
That words like us and we  
Seem much the same to them  
As tales of fairies and of other worlds?

Who killed Safdar Hashmi?

We killed him, you and I  
By looking the other way  
By accepting a world where  
Fair is foul and foul is fair

Our cowardice, our silence  
Our tryst with gain and loss  
Killed him dead before a blow was struck

In another world, with other creeds  
The hands that rose to strike him  
Would never rise for fear and shame

A thousand Safdars more will die  
Until we learn to die  
To all the trash we hold so dear  
And clutch unto our breasts

Until cold death  
Spawns love and care and kindness  
In our hearts

## *Halla Bol*

Halla Bol, Halla Bol  
Our dreams are dead, we've sold our souls  
Halla Bol, Halla Bol  
For comfort we will play all roles

Now I like all the others  
Oft looked the other way  
When thinly-veiled oppression  
Right before me lay

I had a happy home and  
A real good job to match  
So why speak up, be foolish  
My happiness to snatch?

Embroider myself in issues  
For one I never knew  
Bid goodbye to comfort  
A silly thing to do

'Cause politics is dicey  
They can break your head  
Beat you blue with iron rods  
And leave you very dead



Our dreams are dead, we've sold our souls  
Halla Bol, Halla Bol  
For comfort we will play all roles

But then one day it wasn't  
So easy any more  
When no stranger's story  
Came out to the fore

He was no friend, but he had  
Been in my college class  
For four years studying English  
That academic farce

So when the morning paper  
Said he was on the brink  
Beaten by some lumpens  
It made me stop and think

And when he died soon after  
I heard an angry hiss  
From somewhere deep within me:  
This is rank cowardice

Halla Bol, Halla Bol  
Our dreams are dead, we've sold our souls  
Halla Bol, Halla Bol  
For comfort we will play all roles



It is because of moderates  
Good folks like you and me  
Who never stand or speak up  
That such a thing can be

Done to men and women  
Across our great big land  
Because we never raise our  
Voice, or make a stand

When poets sell their words to  
Meet terrestrial need  
Limpid prose is fuel to  
Cold commercial greed

Our few years on this planet  
Forever will not last  
Will we ever stand up?  
Or keep on crawling past?

Halla Bol, Halla Bol  
Our dreams are dead, we've sold our souls  
Halla Bol, Halla Bol  
For comfort we will play all roles

The fate of Safdar Hashmi  
Is not his fate alone  
Rude death stalks every corner  
And in the wind is blown

Brute force is going crazy  
No hand is on the rein  
And every brother Abel  
Runs from another Cain

It's time we took some time off  
To speak for this frail earth  
Or soon there'll be no time for  
Our hollow, ragged mirth

Our land has many Safdars  
Facing violent death  
And if we still keep silent  
We seal it with our breath

Halla Bol, Halla Bol  
Our dreams are dead, we've sold our souls  
Halla Bol, Halla Bol  
For comfort we will play all roles

## *An Ode to Safdar*

The player did not know what had transpired  
He stared unbelieving at the gang of toughs  
A moment past he was a man inspired  
But now, before his eyes, he saw the rough  
Outlines of things with sticks and rods and stones  
Creating stark dark drama on the street  
Their menace overflowed and stained the sky  
In moments some crude sticks would break frail bones  
Turn life and living to red butcher's meat  
For sticks don't think, and stones can't hear men cry

Move back, move back, take cover now, go hide  
He signalled to his fellows, go away  
Run to that building quick, and get inside  
I'll hold them off, be off, it's death to stay  
They all went slow, uncertain of his fate  
But go they did, although their nerves did grate  
They stormed the door, the player followed fast  
And locked it, they were all secure at last  
Frightened, cornered, the players played for time  
Victims of this strange, unnatural crime

But just one door was little help at all  
The laughing, shouting screams soon filled the road  
The laughing, shouting screams were in the hall  
The lock it snapped, the door it bore the load  
Blind hate was close, a step, a breath away  
And in a bid to help protect his friends  
He stood before the snarling, red-eyed mob  
Before he stepped right out into the fray  
Like the oak that will not ever bend  
But rather break, before its strength is robbed

The sticks came down, came down with cruel intent  
And made mad music on his arms and head  
And he who to enliven people went  
Was beat and beat till he was all but dead  
The crowd stepped back, the Force stood still to see  
But when the time was past, it was too late  
The crowd awoke, the battered body still  
While would-be helpers of their woes did prate  
And cabs and rickshaws haggled 'bout their fee  
'Cos death is fine, but it must fit the bill

Not all of us did know this player cast  
In role severe, performance of his life  
But if we look into our nameless past  
We've looked away from that poor stranger's strife  
In many forms, in many ways, we've left  
The striving to the other man, next door  
Because we have so much, so much to lose  
Because we blame the thief, but not our theft  
Because, if we just strip it to the core  
It's you, and I, and him, in those poor shoes

So let us wake, and see the world anew  
A world where sticks and stones are mute and still  
A world where just a chosen, special few  
With their mighty mansions on the hill  
Fix not the fate of man and bird and beast  
To play the dulcet tune for their big feast  
A world where man turns not away from man  
Where it's not always stars and also-ran  
Where power and money cannot ever cloak  
The sores, and turn life to a ragged joke



*What about the Other Guy?*

Then what about that other guy  
Who ended up so very dead?  
Who, passing by, just got to buy  
A fatal dose of hurtling lead

Innocent, just there, bystanding  
Only out to take the air  
No politics he had his hand in  
Shot dead before he turned a hair

So what about our people  
Who in the sun do boil  
With little or no recompense  
For the hard, hard way they toil?

Why do they just keep giving  
Their bodies to the soil?  
What makes them so blind and mute  
To society's hidden foils?

Nor is he the odd man out  
A chap whose luck had just turned bad  
Because, today, each man's fair play  
It's turned into a trip, a fad

Flesh and blood are stopping bullets  
Whole families are grazed away  
Stick and stone break down frail bone  
As we start another day

Well some of us are trapped by  
Temple, mosque and church  
What of the others who are  
Just left out in the lurch?

We have a great old system  
Of caste and kith and kin  
Which holds most of the others  
In the dreary web of sin

Tell me who's to blame at once  
Enquire, detect, discern, descend  
On guilty one, before he runs  
These grave affairs we must now mend

But look, don't joke, what are you doing?  
This glass in front of me you place  
And say, "In your own juice you're stewing."  
Why make me stare at my own face?

But some of us are urbane  
Above such petty things  
We're hungry for the loot and bargain  
For small diamond rings

But yet there is a section  
Of good and decent fellows  
The ideal confection  
But just a little yellow

"Of course it's you, you silly sod."  
He hears his frozen image speak  
"You feed the sick and heal the lame  
But how come you never squeak?"

It's not just him that died that way  
Many die unmourned, in vain  
Far more than what the papers say  
Perish in the howling rain

This yellow crowd is large, and  
Unnoticed in its silence  
A little pluck, a show of guts  
Might stop this mindless violence

It isn't just a party  
An anthem or a face  
Or files in musty shelves that  
Will halt this bloody race

There are some folks who're quite upset  
Who think we're making quite a fuss  
Of one Safdar, quite unheeding  
Of million wounds all filled with pus

Hey look, those guys are human too  
They lose their lives, and yet it seems  
No group of people has the time  
To listen to their thoughts, their dreams

No party can do nothing  
No leader can be blamed  
Unless we quit our grasping  
Our narrowness, our claims

This whole atrocious structure  
Is built of you and me  
Innocent bystanders  
With code and club and creed

If we all can't walk for Safdar  
With full support from stars and bards  
How will we ever blend, unite  
To help protect those homes of cards?

It's far, far better to be young  
Impetuous, too soon, too late  
Than sort out all the pros and cons  
And leave the others to their fate

So if we want some changes  
The mirror does the trick  
Its chaste and pure reflection  
Our consciences should prick

We are all the bricks that  
Make up this wall of greed  
Unless we see that plain and clear  
No one will be freed



## *The Living Dead*

The majesty of wealth though unabating  
Lights up the cracks in our own splintered nation  
That feeds upon all sounds so raw and grating  
With politics that grow on their negation  
The hungry child and tears of rage are rocked  
In cradles filled with lies and vain pretence  
One rule for us and one for them, you say  
The world's not all the same, with look intense  
While just outside the door they're flogged and  
mocked

But heed it not, forbear, it's nature's play

Send off your kids to school in shoes and ties  
Help them learn the language of oppression  
Bind their wings behind them 'fore they fly  
Shear off all love and joy in six short sessions  
Teach them to cheat, tell lies; be sly, compete  
Put them in lines, teach them it's mine, at once  
Louts that think things out should get the stick  
Tell him this world has men just hired to beat  
The poor up day to day to suit the slick  
Who ride in fancy cars, you silly dance

And when he goes to college, pick the best  
Frequented by nice people of your type  
So even if he turns out quite a pest  
At least he won't be mixing with that tripe  
He'll learn that if he ever goes to bed  
With some sweet girl whose body turns him on  
Then finds one more, the blame is all upon 'er  
He sowed wild oats, 'twas she that got misled  
What if he's done his thing and now is gone?  
A man's got balls, a lady's got her honour

And now, refined, he'll find a steady job  
A filing in magnetic fields of glitter  
Each morn he'll pack his briefcase, join the mob  
That looks for gold amidst the endless litter  
His car goes through the endless zoo of rabble  
In heat it stews, in endless queues, for buses  
He sees the fray, his world goes grey, can't take it  
He sees the trap, and something snaps. Don't babble,  
Says a little voice within, who fusses  
With those silly sods won't ever make it

All that is past, the future now is rosy  
He has a wife, a home upon the hill  
Vicissitudes have fled and all is cosy  
From life's long table he has had his fill  
By God's grace he has a lovely kiddo  
A virgin page upon which life will write  
His father hopes he will grow up well bred  
Heal the sick, or from the law will cite  
The final testament of his libido  
Another soul among the living dead



## *Bread Mansion*

There's a mansion down the road to here  
They call it the Mansion of Bread  
You're only allowed to pass the gate  
When your human nature's dead

There are ladies in the corridor  
Ostensibly not for hire  
But pantingly eager to be laid  
If you pull the proper wire

And the mosquitoes there — they're fussy  
They only bite the residents  
Everything is carefully planned out  
They have no accidents

Rats rustle down their alleyways  
Rattling dead men's bones  
Deals are made in hushed whispers  
On crimson telephones

And executives sit so very busy  
Doodling on onion pads  
Caressing all their clients  
And counting all their wads

And Shakespeare's works, maroon bound  
Lies 'neath the window pane  
They tear it up, page by page  
To wipe off ugly stains

If you're selling something they're eager  
They'll listen with bated breath  
And if you're plush and noble  
They'll even ask about your health

They've traded away cities  
Over a strong martini dry  
Their eyes are kind of narrow  
They can't hear people cry

But they're all right, society's friends  
Who never break a law  
'Cause they always wear velvet mittens  
On their murderous paws

Now you might say they're heartless  
And you may say they're cruel  
Yet you and I must work for them  
To earn our daily gruel

We must be hard-working  
We must earn their trust  
If we want their job and bread, then  
It's vital that we must

And if you sit up one day  
And organise the staff  
You'll be on the street and starving  
Hearing their merry laugh

The Lord made you to labour  
And live by sweat of brow  
So don't ask for any favours  
And never ever ask how

Some people get the dainties  
While you are stuck with mud  
You've got what you deserve, my friend  
It's written in your blood

So give the Lord all that you've got  
And wait for Kingdom come  
You don't even stand a chance out there  
'Cause you're nothing but a dirty bum

Jesus dropped into the mansion  
As He was passing by  
And they thought He was a hippie  
And punched Him in the eye

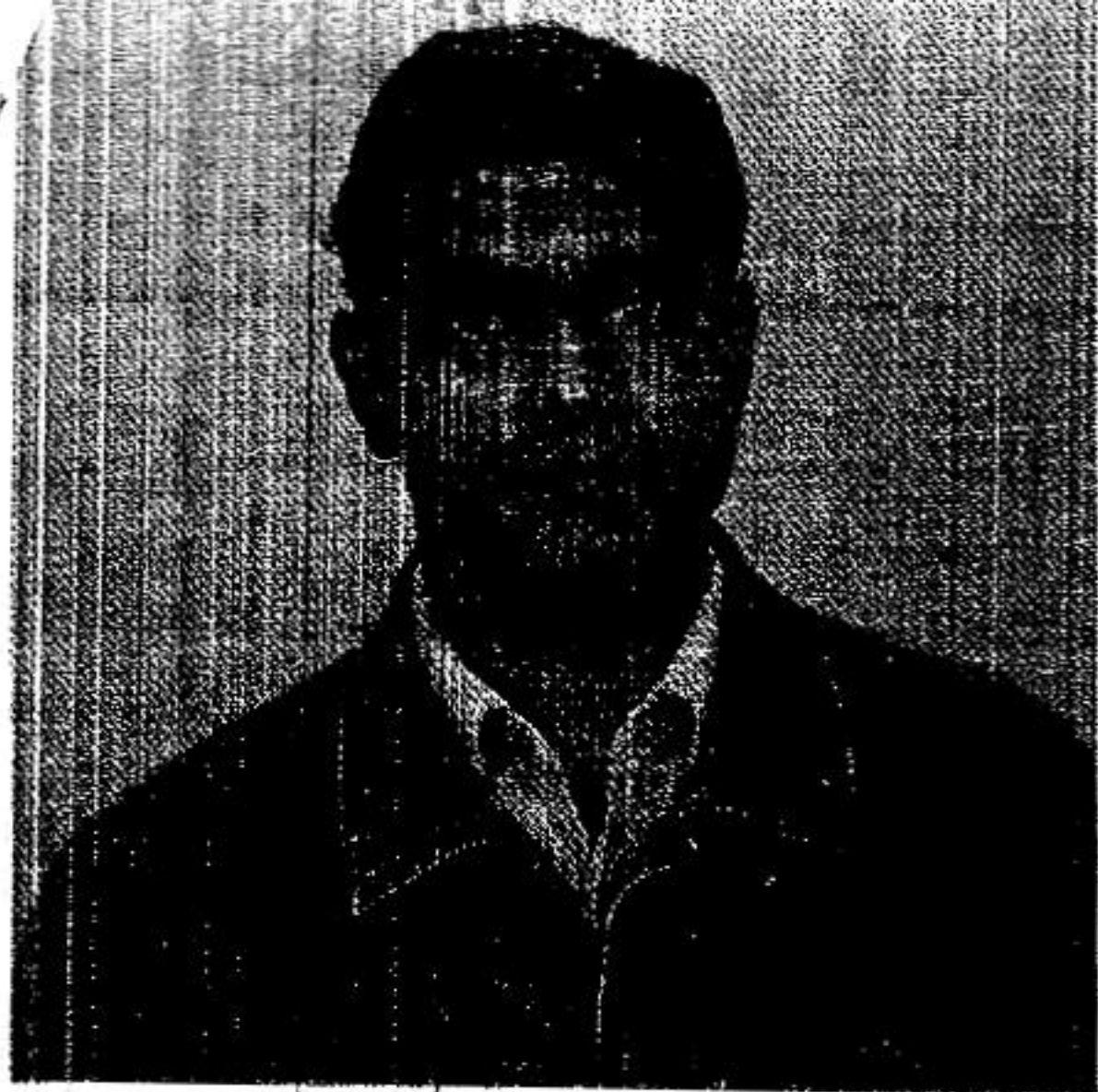
When He turned the other eye  
They punched Him once again  
And threw Him in the alley  
Where a beggar came

He took Him to his hovel  
Put wet mud upon His eyes  
And Jesus felt at home right then  
Beneath the crystal skies

This song has no great moral  
And fights no worthy cause  
Nor asserts eternal providence  
Or upholds aged laws

Man, who thirsts and hungers  
Lives not by bread alone  
If his bread has now become  
A hard, unyielding stone

And though out on Bread Mansion  
They bind all that they find  
They finally find they've traded  
Their precious peace of mind



Amit Jayaram somehow passed his B.A. in English from St. Stephen's College, but found M.A. overpowering, and gratefully succumbed to a career as an advertising writer in 1974.

His interests include writing, film-making, reading, broadcasting, homeopathy, music, the environment, rural development, drama, photography...and not necessarily in that order!

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Poetry

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# A Temple in Ayodhya and other poems

Amit Jayaram

Rupa



"This poet has a genuine feeling for social justice, and the inequitous exploitation of the poor by the rich. He also has an ease with rhyme, so that some of the poems have the flavour of songs or chants to be recited or shared by a group, on the streets, or in a theatre. Such poems should not only be sung on the streets, but included in school-children's texts."

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